

Relief Society will mark birthday by launching service projects

By Susan Lyman-Whitney
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The celebration is to be one of service.

When the Relief Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a 150th birthday on March 17, its 3 million members will mark the occasion with community volunteer projects.

Each Relief Society unit will choose its own project, General Relief Society President Elaine Jack said at a press briefing Tuesday. "We have 18,000 local units. They know better what needs to be done in their own communities."

Some groups already have chosen projects, President Jack said. "Many groups are working with food kitchens, food banks and homes for abused children."

An Australian Relief Society group is lobbying for a detoxification center. In Provo, members are making stuffed animals for police officers to give to children who are victims of accidents or abuse. In Cape Town, South Africa, one local Relief Society is taking in street children. Tennessee women are helping a child-care center in a housing project; they've planned activities for the children and do-



President Elaine Jack

nated toys and a library.

President Jack expects that, once started, the service projects will take on a life of their own and extend far beyond a one-year celebration. "Every woman will realize there's someplace she can serve," she said.

One of the oldest and largest women's organizations in the world, the Relief Society began in Nauvoo, Ill., in 1842 with 20 mem-

bers. Its motto is "Charity Never Faileth."

The sesquicentennial celebration officially begins March 14 with an international women's meeting. Six thousand women are expected to gather in the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City. The program they will watch will be televised live throughout the world.

Literacy is another theme of the anniversary. By the end of the year, President Jack said, programs will be in place to teach every woman to read. In some areas there may be only one illiterate member in a ward or a stake, she said. In some of the 135 nations where there are Relief Society units, there will be larger numbers of women who want to learn to read.

Looking back over a busy history, President Jack said she's proud of many Relief Society accomplishments. "Women have made a significant contribution in the social work area," she said. "Amy Brown Lyman (general president in the early 1900s) worked with Jane Addams at Hull House." Under President Lyman's leadership more than 4,000 women were trained in social work, and the church's adop-

tion, employment, health-care and other social service programs were established.

President Jack also mentioned the women's suffrage movement. Because Latter-day Saint women worked for full political equality, women in the Utah Territory cast the first female ballots in the nation.

"Publications were also critically important," President Jack said. "The Women's Exponent was the first women's newspaper west of the Mississippi. And there was the Relief Society magazine, which was published until 1970."

Women of all religions, ages, colors and cultural backgrounds will be acknowledged this year through LDS Church-produced public-service announcements, said Carol Clark, President Jack's administrative assistant. The television spots show everyday women doing everyday things — running in a race, picking up litter, driving a car pool to a soccer game, helping a neighbor move, taking time to talk to a child.

The message, said Clark, is "You do a lot." Even as they urge women to take on new community service projects, she said, the Relief Society recognizes that there are seasons to each woman's life — years when she can spend a lot of time in community work, years when she can spend only a little time. No one needs to feel guilty, Clark said. "You should know you are already doing great things."

